

Fiqh of Entertainment

Permissible and Impermissible forms of
Entertainment

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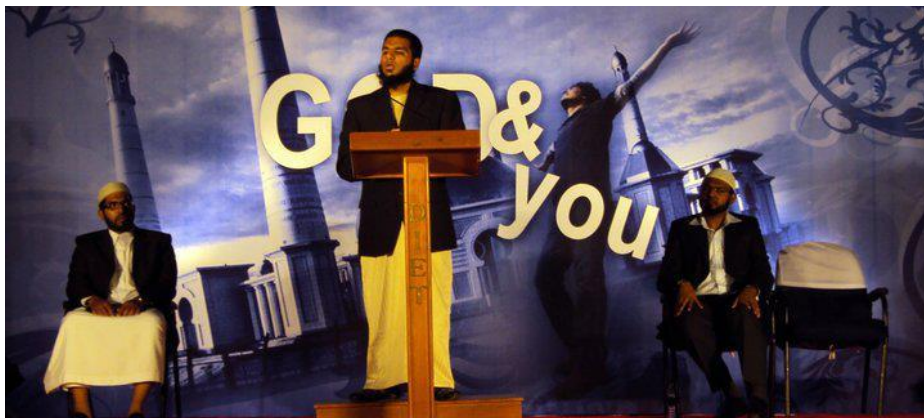
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Introduction to Author - Ismail Kamdar:

Born on 1 September 1986 in Durban, South Africa, Abu Muawiyah began his study of Islam at the age of thirteen. After seven years in Darul Uloom, Abu Muawiyah graduated at the age of twenty and continued his study of Islam under scholars from a variety of groups and math'habs. In 2007, Abu Muawiyah joined the Islamic Online University as one of its first students. In this same year, he met Dr Bilal Philips and became one of his notable students. In January 2014, he completed a BAIS through the Islamic Online University.

Abu Muawiyah has served as a Da'ee for IIFRI, and served various Islamic Schools and Colleges teaching a variety of curriculum. Currently, he is serving Islamic Online University as Head Tutorial Assistant for BAIS and Higher Diploma Program and assist students in studies of Fiqh, Arabic Language, Tafseer, Etiquettes, History and Aqeedah. He also lectures at numerous workshops, radio, TV Channels and youth programs each year. Abu Muawiyah is the author of "Having Fun the Halal Way: Entertainment in Islam" and hosted two weekly Radio Programs "The Divine Connection: Understanding the Quran" and "Dawah Dynamics" from 2012 until 2013.



Introduction – Entertainment in Islam:

Indeed all praise is due to Allāh (subḥānahu wa ta'āla) and we ask Him to send His peace and blessings to the universe, the final messenger Muḥammad and to everybody who follows his way with righteousness until the last day.

The topic I have chosen to discuss today is the issues related to entertainment in Islam. This topic is one that comes up with many of the young Muslims. They seem to have this understanding that having fun is not permitted for the believer, and this understanding is something which drives them away from practicing Islam as they begin to find Islam constraining and difficult upon themselves.

What we will be looking at in this short video is some of the proofs as to what is the Islamic position towards entertainment which is ḥalāl, which is ḥarām, and what is recommended.

Attitude of People Towards Entertainment

We need to begin by first examining the attitude of people towards entertainment. Among those who live a worldly life without any attachment to the religion, their understanding of entertainment is that this is what life is all about. Many people live their lives for entertainment. They want to have fun even though they work and earn money. The money is used to purchase more means of entertainment. If they have a television, they are working harder to buy a bigger television. If they have a car with a radio in it, they want to buy a radio with an MP3 player. If it has an MP3 player, they want to buy a DVD player for the car. If they have PlayStation 2,

they want to buy PlayStation 3. It is always about more and getting more entertainment and enjoying life more.

This is the attitude of those who are caught up in the dunya among the Muslims and the non-Muslims. This is a very destructive attitude as it distracts us from the purpose of life. Allāh (subḥānahu wa ta'āla) created us to primarily worship and obey Him. If we are distracted too many hours by making money and then using that money to have fun, what happens is that we now do not have time to worship Allāh. You find people who when you tell them to join you for an Islamic project, the first excuse is “we don't have time.” They have time to watch 3 hours of movies every day and play four hours of video games every day, but they don't have one hour to devote to Allāh (subḥānahu wa ta'āla). This is a very dangerous position to be in.

It is these types of people who Allāh (subḥānahu wa ta'āla) speaks about in the Qur'ān in Sūrat'l-Takāthur when He says, “The competition to gather the nice things in this world has distracted you until you visit the graves (meaning until you die). Then only will you come to know the reality. Definitely then only will you come to know the reality.” Allāh continues in the surah and says that these people who spend their entire lives chasing after the dunya when they die “they will see the hellfire with their own eyes, and on that Day, Allāh will ask them about the good things He gave them in this world and what they did with them.” It is very important for us that while we as humans want to have fun, we should not allow this to distract us from our purpose in life. We need to prioritize and realize that the purpose why Allāh created us is to worship Him. This should always be a priority.

The idea of just having fun and enjoying life and making money is not an Islamic understanding of the world. The Islamic understanding, however, is not the opposite extreme. There are Muslims who go to the opposite extreme and say that we are here only to worship Allāh so there is no such thing as entertainment and there is no such thing as having fun, but this is a misunderstanding. This is a wrong understanding of Islam.

The correct attitude of a Muslim is that Allāh (subḥānahu wa ta'āla) created us upon the fiṭrah. He created us with natural inclinations towards good or evil. There is nothing in this religion which is against our fiṭrah. Anything that is part of human nature is accommodated for in Islam, and so to the human need for recreation is also accommodated.

We find that Islam allows people to enjoy themselves but in ways that are wholesome, pure and ḥalāl. If you look at the principles of fiqh, one of the principles of fiqh when it comes to things of this world is that everything is permissible unless you have proof that it is prohibited. This applies to forms of entertainment as well. Those forms of entertainment which are clearly prohibited in the Qur'ān or in the Sunnah or by analogy are the prohibited forms, but everything else is permissible as long as they fulfill basic criteria.

There is a narration that some people bring forth, and they say that this narration prohibits all forms of entertainment except three. There are two versions, and one says three and one says four. The narration is that all of the recreational things of this world are bāṭil (void) and a waste of time except for three (another narration says four). The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) described them as archery, horseback riding, and swimming. In the other narration the fourth one added is wrestling.

Some scholars based on this narration say that these four are the only permissible types of entertainment. In his Iḥyā' 'Ulum'l-Dīn, Imām al-Ghazālī (raḥimahullāh) gives a very good response to this. Imām al-Ghazālī mentions that, “Just because these few are mentioned in one ḥadīth does not necessarily mean that other forms are all ḥarām because there are many other narrations that the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) and the ṣaḥābah entertained themselves in other ways not mentioned in this ḥadīth.” The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) used to race with his wife on foot and used to watch people play with swords in the masjid. They used to have competitions with watermelon seeds, and they used to do many other things. Some of the children used to play with toys, and it goes on and on. There were many other things they used to do.

This ḥadīth is not limiting what is ḥalāl. Furthermore, the word in the ḥadīth is not ḥarām. The word in the ḥadīth is “bāṭil,” meaning that there is no reward in it. If there is no reward in something, it does not make it ḥarām. It is still ḥalāl unless you have proof for it to be prohibited. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) is telling us that these forms of entertainment are rewarding. If you ride a horse, train with archery, or are swimming, these are types [of entertainment] that are rewarding because they keep you physically fit and energized and this is something which is good in Islam. It does not necessarily mean that others are prohibited.

We need to understand the primary principle is that when it comes to entertainment, everything is permissible unless we have proof for it being prohibited.

Allāh (subḥānahu wa ta'āla) tells us in the Qur'ān, “Allāh wants things to be easy for you. He does not want to make things difficult

for you.” Allāh says, “There is nothing in this religion which is a burden.”

Conditions that Make the ḥalāl ḥarām

From among the other principles which cover the issue of entertainment, besides the rule that everything is ḥalāl unless proven ḥarām, there are certain things if they are found in the aspect of entertainment, they become ḥarām. These things include:

1. Including any element of ḥarām.

Something might be ḥalāl in itself, but the minute elements of ḥarām get involved, a person should stay away from it. For example, playing sports like cricket, football, soccer, or these types of things, in itself is ḥalāl, but if playing is going to make a person vulgar and abusive to his friends, then it is not permissible for such a person to play it even though it is permissible for others. The first thing is that it should not lead to what is ḥarām.

2. It should not consume too much of our time.

If one is playing video games for ten hours a day or one is watching two or three movies a day or one is watching cricket for five days in a row for six hours a day, then this can become ḥarām as you allow wasting time. To waste our time is not permissible in Islam. We should have entertainment in ways which refresh us without consuming all our time. Two hours a day or three hours a day is ok if you are spending the rest of the day in what is good in issues of 'ibādah and work and family time. To let it consume your time is not permissible.

3. It should not consume your resources.

Somebody who is spending all of his money on entertainment, this is not permissible. We are responsible for not only how we earn money but also how we spend it, so again, we need to balance our lifestyle and not be from those whom Allāh calls the musrifūn, those who are wasteful when it comes to spending their money.

These are some of the conditions that could make something which is ḥalāl ḥarām.

Prohibited Forms of Entertainment

There are certain forms of entertainment which are completely prohibited in Islam from the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Anything involving intoxication, whether it is alcohol or drugs, is prohibited. Anything involving or leading to zina is prohibited. Any such a place where people go to entertain themselves which is again of alcohol or zina or drugs or nowadays you get places where you can find all of these things together, such places are prohibited for us to attend.

Likewise, gambling is completely prohibited. Any form of entertainment which involves shirk is also prohibited. Many times Muslims don't realize when they are doing something for fun that it actually involves shirk. You will hear Muslims playing a game and one Muslim will tell his friend, "My character is omnipresent" or "My character is lives for eternity." This is shirk. Only Allāh has these qualities. Even to give these qualities to characters in a game is not permissible.

Likewise, any form of entertainment which involves fortune telling is not permissible. There are various other things. For example, when it comes to the issue of joking and comedy, there are many rules which regulate this in Islam. Islam is not against joking in itself, but the content needs to be clean and free from shirk and must not be mocking Islam or the Muslims. Anything which is part of Islam cannot be mocked. If there is something that Muslims do which is not Islamic and you are mocking them to show them that this is not Islamic, that is ok. But when you are mocking Islam, this is kufr. It is very important for those Muslims involved in the field of entertainment known as comedy to be very careful what they say and to study deeper the fiqh of joking and to use this fiqh accordingly and to make the jokes accordingly so that they do not step onto this dangerous territory.

Recommended Forms of Entertainment

There are other forms of entertainment which are recommended, as we mentioned in the ḥadīth: swimming, archery, horse riding and wrestling and other forms of physical martial arts. These types of things are recommended because they help keep the body fit. Likewise, spending time with your wife and your children is all recommended in Islam and in fact it sometimes even becomes obligatory on a person to spend at least a minimal amount of time with their family members. Having fun together with your children and with your wife are things which Islam recommends. Take them out. Go to a park. Go and eat out together. These things are very much recommended as it helps to strengthen the unity of the family.

Likewise, dealing with nature brings you closer to Allāh (subḥānahu wa ta'āla), so if you enjoy visiting zoos and parks and places where there is a lot of nature and animals, alḥamdulillāh this is something which is good. Islamic songs are also something which is recommended according to some and permissible according to others. In my view, it is something good which will take people away from the prohibited forms of music. Likewise there are many other things when you study the Qur'ān and Sunnah. You will find in the sīrah of the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) many ways in which he and his companions used to have fun which are completely ḥalāl. If the Prophet (peace be upon him) recommended it, then it becomes something which is recommended as well.

When it comes to the issues of entertainment, there are two main areas where we have a lot of questions. The first is in the issue of animations and drawings and the second is the issue of music and musical instruments. I want to focus primarily on these two topics for the remainder of the session.

Animation and Drawings

When it comes to animation, there are various opinions from the scholars. As 'Ā'ishah (raḍyAllāhu 'anha) narrates a ḥadīth, the Prophet (peace be upon him) prohibited the drawing of living creatures. 'Ā'ishah (raḍyAllāhu 'anha) herself also narrates that she used to play with dolls in the presence of the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam). One of these dolls was a horse with wings, and the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) did not see anything wrong with her playing with these dolls.

So the scholars have differed on this issue. Some scholars looking only at the first ḥadīth have said that the drawing of living creatures is completely prohibited. Other scholars, trying to reconcile between both ḥadīths, have come to various opinions. The two most common opinions are that either drawings are permissible unless they lead to glorification or shirk or the more common, and the stronger opinion, is that drawings are prohibited unless they are for entertainment and education of children. Any form of drawing or depiction of living creatures which is for the entertainment of children or for the educational purposes, many of the scholars have ruled that these are permissible. So children's toys, animated movies, and these sorts of things based on this will be permissible.

Obviously then the issue comes about content. When it comes to animation, even these days many of the animated movies produced by non-Muslims have content which is questionable for Muslims to watch, so parents need to screen the type of animation they allow their children to watch, something they themselves have gone through first to make sure that there is nothing in it which will take the children away from Islam and that the content is clean and then allow them to watch it.

While this is going on, it is very important for Muslims who have access to making media and producing videos, such Muslims should focus on making animated movies for Muslim children, which have Islamic content. Alḥamdulillāh this is something which is happening nowadays and it is something where there is a lot of room for growth and expansion. This will become an alternative for the children so that they do not get involved in the types of movies and entertainment which are prohibited.

Some people might say that television in itself is prohibited, but this is not the correct opinion. The correct opinion is that it depends on the content. If somebody is watching this video, there is absolutely nothing wrong with watching such a video as the content is Islamic. If somebody is watching a video that has ḥarām elements in it, then that is not permissible. One has to look at the content of the specific video to declare if it is permissible or not. The television and videos are in themselves tools, and the tools are ḥalāl. What they are used for and what is viewed on them is what makes them ḥalāl or ḥarām. The same ruling applies to animated movies.

From the ḥadīth of 'Ā'ishah (radīAllāhu 'anha), scholars have deduced that children's toys are permissible, animated movies for children are permissible, animated books for children are permissible. This is one of opinion of scholars. Some scholars do disagree with this, there is no doubt about it. This is the opinion that I follow, and Allāh knows best.

Music and Musical Instruments

The other issue which crops up most often when it comes to entertainment is the issue of music.¹ We have one group of Muslims who are saying that music is completely prohibited and there is no two ways about it.

(Sheikh Saleh Al-Munajjid has compiled a detailed collection of opinions of scholars who consider musical instruments as impermissible. It can be viewed from: <http://islamqa.info/en/5000> - Comment added by editor).

¹ It is important for readers to contact authentic Islamic scholars before deciding anything in this matter and follow the more cautious approach, as mentioned in this article as well. A large number of scholars consider music as impermissible and present a number of evidences from Quran, Hadith and Athar (narrations from companions).

We have another group of Muslims saying that music is completely permissible and those who are saying it is prohibited are extremists. Both of these groups have not understood the nature of fiqh when it comes to the issue of music. Imām al-Shakwāni (rahimahullāh) has written a very good book on this topic called *Ibtālu Da'wa'l-ijmā' 'Ala Taḥrīm Muṭluq'l-Samā'*. This book is available in Arabic and has not been translated into English yet. In this book, Imām al-Shawkāni mentions something very interesting and a very different approach to this debate that many of us have today.

He says, "I have never listened to music in my life. I believe that musical instruments are prohibited, but I am writing this book and showing all the different viewpoints with their arguments so people can understand that there is difference of opinion on this issue and so that we can tolerate each others' opinions and not accuse our Muslim brother of kufr and deviation."

This is a very important point when it comes to this issue. There is a difference of opinion here, and if somebody is convinced of a different opinion than you, it does not make them a disbeliever and it does not make them a deviant, rather this is an issue of fiqh which the scholars have differed over.

If you look at the madh-habs, the Ḥanafī madh-hab ruled that all musical instruments are prohibited. Even the tapping of your finger on the table or the desk to make noise is prohibited according to the Ḥanafī madh-hab. The Ḥanbalī madh-hab is of the view that the hand drum, the duff, is permissible. They differ over whether it is only permissible for women and only for special occasions and whether it is permissible for everyone. The Mālīkī madh-hab, if you study it carefully, is of the view that drums are permissible. In the Mālīkī book of fiqh which I have read, whenever it talks about the

prohibition of music, it only mentions wind instruments, and from there scholars have mentioned that drums are permissible according to that madh-hab. The opinion of the Zāhiri madh-hab, the madhhab of Ibn Ḥazm (raḥimahullāh), is that all musical instruments are permissible.

These views all exist among the madh-habs, and nobody can deny that they have existed among the madh-habs. It is for the scholars to study the different evidences and to follow that which their study has led them to believe is the most correct conclusion. If that conclusion is different from yours or mine, we must tolerate it and accept it as a difference of opinion.

Nonetheless, for the average Muslim who does not have knowledge of fiqh and the principles of fiqh and the ability to decide between the madh-habs, in these issues it is always better to stay on the safe side and to follow the majority opinion and to follow the strongest opinion. When it comes to the prohibition of musical instruments, the majority of madh-habs agree that wind instruments are prohibited even though Ibn Ḥazm and Imām Ghazālī and a few others disagreed with them. **The majority said that it is prohibited.** To be on the safe side, the average Muslim who has not been able to research this issue should stay away from such instruments and songs which include such instruments for their own safety as this is now a grey area.

The other issue of the drums and the duff is something where there is a lot more difference of opinions among the scholars. There is a much bigger difference of opinion amongst them. As a result, on such issues there is a lot more room for differences. This is an area of difference of opinion amongst the scholars – musical instruments and whether they are prohibited or permissible – and accordingly every

scholar and those who follow a specific scholar have the right to follow what their ijtihād has led them to even if it is a different conclusion from you or me.

Linking this to the issue of animation and movies: Somebody will ask, “I believe and follow the opinion that musical instruments are prohibited, but the animated movies and other movies have a lot of background music in them. Can I watch these movies while ignoring the music?” We go back to a fatwa of Shaykh'l-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah who mentioned that just like hearing the Qur'ān is not rewarding (you have to listen to the Qur'ān to receive the reward), similarly hearing music is not sinful and you have to listen to the music for it to be sinful. If you are in a place where there is music being played in the background and you are not paying attention to it, you are not sinful for it. Likewise, if you are watching a program on television where there is music in the background and you are not paying attention to the music, then – and Allāh knows best – that would be in my opinion permissible.²

² It was narrated that Naafi' (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: Ibn 'Umar heard a woodwind instrument, and he put his fingers in his ears and kept away from that path. He said to me, O Naafi', can you hear anything? I said, No. So he took his fingers away from his ears and said: I was with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and he heard something like this, and he did the same thing. (Saheeh Abi Dawood). Some insignificant person said that this hadeeth does not prove that musical instruments are haraam, because if that were so, the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) would have instructed Ibn 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with them both) to put his fingers in his ears as well, and Ibn 'Umar would have instructed Naafi' to do likewise! The response to this is: He was not listening to it, but he could hear it. There is a difference between listening and hearing. Shaykh al-Islam (Ibn Taymiyah) (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: Concerning (music) which a person does not intend to listen to, there is no prohibition or blame, according to scholarly consensus. Hence blame or praise is connected to listening, not to hearing. The one who listens to the Qur'aan will be rewarded for it, whereas the one who hears it without intending or wanting to will not be rewarded for that, because actions are judged by intentions. The same applies to musical instruments which are forbidden: if a person hears them without intending to, that does not matter. (al-Majmoo', 10/78).

Ibn Qudaamah al-Maqdisi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: the listener is the one who intends to hear, which was not the case with Ibn 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with them both); what happened in his case was hearing. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) needed to know when the sound stopped because he had moved away from that path and blocked his ears. So he did not want to go back to that path or unblock his ears until the noise had stopped, so when he allowed Ibn 'Umar to continue hearing it, this was because of necessity. (al-Mughni, 10/173)

For those Muslims who are involved in media and in producing animated movies or documentaries or any other type of Islamic media, my recommendation to you is that even if you are of the opinion that instruments are permissible, you should not include them in your videos. The reason for this is that you are trying to reach out to the Muslims. When you include music in your videos, the majority of Muslims or at least 50% of the Muslims are not going to watch that video because there is music in it, so you are now alienating a portion of the ummah from receiving your message. If your purpose of making the video was as many Muslims as possible watch and benefit from it, it will be better to avoid those instruments which most Muslims regard as prohibited even if your personal opinion is that it is permissible. For the sake of benefiting the ummah in general, it is better even for those who view it as permissible to stay away from it.

These are some of the issues of entertainment which crop up. The issues of music and animation are perhaps two of the more common areas in which we have questions.

Games

Another area where there are a lot of questions is when it comes to games and two types of games: board games and video games. The ruling for both is the same. The ruling for both is that the content would make it permissible or prohibited. Those board games which are generally for gambling will not be permissible. If you are playing those same games without any gambling involved, then too the scholars have ruled it to be makrūh (disliked) as it is one of those things that leads to gambling, so it is better to stay away from such games.

One of the games that crops up often is playing the game of chess. Many scholars have ruled chess to be ḥarām while others have ruled it to be permissible. From my study of the evidences and arguments used, I honestly believe that the playing of chess is permissible with the conditions I mentioned earlier that it does not constitute too much of your time and it does not lead to other prohibited things, etc. and whatever I mentioned earlier as being the conditions for a form of entertainment to be permissible. In my view, this applies to chess as well. In itself, it seems to be a harmless game to me. The evidences I have seen against it are either weak or mistranslated or even at times misunderstood.

For example, in one of the books of fiqh, one of the scholars of the madh-habs said, “There is no good in chess,” so some scholars took this as a prohibition of chess. The wording of this statement is not saying it is ḥarām, but it is just saying that there is no reward in it. It doesn't necessarily make it ḥarām, it is just saying there is no reward and no good in it. Allāh knows best. My opinion is that the game of chess is permissible.

When it comes to video games, again the content is what matters. It should not be addictive and should not consume too much of your time or too much of your wealth and resources or lead you to do anything ḥarām. All of this needs to apply. Such a video game which fulfills these conditions, and again which has clean content and you yourself do not play too much of so that it does not consume your time and you are not spending too much of your money on it, then Allāh knows best, but such games would be permissible with these conditions. And Allāh knows best.

Advice

I would like to conclude this short discussion by mentioning that the times we are living in entertainment is everywhere, and we as Muslims if we want our children and the young Muslims to be safe from the various forms of vulgar and sexually provocative entertainment that is out there, then we need to start producing alternatives for them. We need to start producing Islamic media. We need more Islamic songs, Islamic movies, Islamic animations, Islamic games. All of this needs to be produced as a wholesome alternative for the young Muslims, so that they do not have to turn to other people and other resources when they want to have fun. They have good and wholesome fun available to them.

Likewise, the masjids need to open up for youngsters to have fun at the masjids and build sports centers at the masjid or in the sisters section allowing room where they can sit and talk about things which are permissible and have some fun. Maybe build a swimming pool. Whatever is within the budget of the masjid. Create these recreational facilities for the Muslims because if we don't provide alternatives, they by their nature, especially those who are young, want to have fun. If the alternatives are not there, then people will turn to the ḥarām sources for fun.

It is very, very important that we as an ummah start working towards producing these ḥalāl forms of entertainment. It is very important that we make this a priority to produce alternative ḥalāl media for the Muslim youth and ḥalāl forms of recreation for them. I ask Allāh to make it easy for us to practice our religion, to understand our religion correctly, and to enjoy what Allāh has made ḥalāl in this world in a way that does not cause us to forget Him and to forget our purpose in life.

Anything I said that is wrong is from my own self and from Shayṭān. Everything I said which is correct is from Allāh. I ask Allāh to make this an addition to our scale of good deeds on the Last Day.